

**Statement by Václav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, at the luncheon  
hosted by The President of the United States of America Bill Clinton**

**Prague, January 12, 1994**

Distinguished Presidents, Prime Ministers and Ministers,  
ladies and gentlemen,

We are living in a time of great historical challenge. With the fall of communism came the end of the division of Europe between a democratic one and the one subjugated to the Soviet Empire. The Cold War ended and the world stopped suffering from the tension between the Euro-American civilization, based on respect for human freedom, and the imperialistic ambitions of Soviet communism - a tension that could have been fatal to the human race. An unnatural European order, resting on an armed coexistence of its free and non-free parts, has collapsed. We are now living in a time of dramatic searching for a new order, in which no one would be subjugated or endangered any longer, and which would enable all European peoples and states to enjoy an atmosphere of peaceful cooperation backed by a peaceful arrangement extending throughout the entire northern hemisphere. Progress toward this new order is a big -- I will even venture to say historic -- task of our time and our generation.

I view our today's meeting as an important moment during this journey. The American President's visit to Prague, coming immediately after the NATO Summit in Brussels, is not just a visit to the Czech Republic. It is also a visit to Central Europe, and I see it as proof that the United States and NATO are well aware of the great importance that stability, security and peace in our region have for peace in all of Europe and for the security of the USA. Truly, history is amply teaching us that ignoring this area never paid off for anyone, that instability here always inevitably grew into instability on a pan-European scale, that our loss of freedom had pernicious consequences for everyone, and that lack of interest in our fate or policies sacrificing us for an illusory peace always led to general catastrophes. I believe that the West realizes this and that its effort to open its political and security structures to Central European nations comes not just from respect for their desires and interests, but from its own desires and interests as well. For me, our meeting is proof of that.

Please allow me a few remarks now about the position of the Czech Republic on the main themes of this meeting.

1. Our country feels it is a legitimate part of Western Euro-American civilization, and shares all of its fundamental values. It does not see itself as someone looking for a new home. We have our

home. For centuries, we have helped shape its spiritual and political values. If today we are aspiring to become a regular member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, we do so above all because we subscribe to the same values of civilization which it protects, and because we want to take part in protecting them. So the issue is not only that we, as a small state in an exposed position, seek allies, security ties and guarantees, but also that we are willing to take our share of the joint responsibility for the fate of freedom and democracy on our continent -- the responsibility on which NATO was founded.

2. The Czech Republic welcomes the Partnership for Peace proposal as a good point of departure in NATO's quest for a new identity and new role in new conditions. We know that Western civilization is an open society in principle, and for that reason we consider it logical and right that the Alliance is actively opening itself up in this way to all European countries and is thus assuming the role of a true stabilizing core of European security. We also appreciate that Partnership for Peace allows individual approaches to different countries. In our opinion, everything depends on what specific forms and contents the project will take in the various countries. The Czech Republic wants to do everything it can to ensure that within Partnership for Peace, the relationship between our country and the Alliance be as solid as possible, to enable us to get closer to NATO fast, and to eventually result in full membership. In other words, we do not see Partnership for Peace as a substitute for full membership, or as the ultimate achievement in our endeavor to work together with the Alliance, but as a beginning of our cooperation and as a first step toward joining NATO.

3. The Czech Republic is well aware that it is neither possible nor desirable to isolate Russia, and that the relationship between the Alliance and Russia, as a large, Euro-Asian nuclear power, should be as good as possible. That is in the interest of the whole world. For our part, we have been systematically striving to have good relations with Russia, Ukraine and other nations of the former Soviet Union, whether or not they are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. True, the journey of the Russian society to democracy and market-based prosperity will be painful, complicated and long, and the outside world has only limited possibilities to exert a positive influence on the internal developments in Russia. Therefore, the task now is to develop such a relationship between NATO and Russia that will respect all the specific circumstances of Russia's position as well as of possible future developments. There, too, Partnership for Peace could be a point of departure toward that kind of a special relationship which, rather than obstruct NATO's expansion, should become a natural background for the process. Expansion of NATO would not mean bringing an enemy closer to Russia's borders. On the contrary, it would mean bringing closer a partner and a zone of stability and democracy, and that is in Russia's fundamental interest as well. We therefore definitely reject those Russian voices that would wish to prevent such expansion, interpret it as endangerment, or even call for a renewal of a Russian sphere of

influence in Central Europe. We are an independent state, and we decide ourselves about our affiliations and our policies.

4. Naturally, it is for each of our respective countries to determine for itself how energetically and quickly it will move to give Partnership for Peace a content meeting its interests and possibilities. At the same time, however, we deem it important to cultivate good relations among ourselves, work together wherever it is advantageous to all and in their joint interest, and thus maintain a good regional climate. Good relations with neighbors are in the fundamental interest of each of our countries as well as in the fundamental interest of Europe as a whole.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we agreed during conversations with the representatives of Central European nations who are taking part in this meeting, our countries have very similar views on the issues I just talked about. That surely is a gratifying circumstance, and it is to the benefit of us all.

The Czech Republic is prepared to accept the NATO offer entitled Partnership for Peace and to immediately begin talks about its specific content. We are fully prepared to negotiate about the relevant protocols and to offer cooperation in all areas in which the proposal envisages or proposes it.

Distinguished Presidents, ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, please allow me to express my firm belief that this Prague gathering will have been successful, that it will become an important landmark on the road to a new democratic and truly peaceful Europe sharing firm and natural ties with its most natural civilization partner, the North American continent, and that it will prove to have been a significant contribution to the creation of a truly just political and security arrangement in the entire northern hemisphere. At one time, the city of Yalta went down in history as a symbol of the division of Europe. I would be happy if today, the city of Prague could emerge as a symbol of Europe standing in alliance.

Thank you for your attention.